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ANCESTOR HUNTING.



Some Account of a Week Spent in Windham County,
Vermont, During the Month
of June, 1901.



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than an infidel."—Horace Greeley.



By **HAMLIN E. ROBINSON, G. M. B.**
Editor Maryville Republican.



MARYVILLE, MISSOURI.
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Only Fifty copies of this little brochure were printed
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This is Number *1.0* *H. E. Robinson*

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ANCESTOR HUNTING.



The Author.

ANCESTOR HUNTING.



Have any of my readers ever been on an ancestor hunting expedition?

If so, they will heartily sympathise with the following sketchy account of such a trip, and if not, perhaps something told here may awaken a desire to participate in like joys.

For a long time it had been my desire to make some researches in New England, hoping to trace the footsteps of my forefathers who long ago conquered the wild and rugged mountain sides, and by dint of incessant labor frugally brought up their children and trained them in the way they should go. If ever there was a "strenuous life," it was passed by the generations who cleared and tilled New England during the two centuries and a half following its settlement by the Anglo Saxon. The years of contest with the aboriginal red man and his French and English allies, the savage beasts which glared from behind almost every rock and tree, the soil so filled with flinty stone that every shower threatened to leave nothing but the worth-

less substratum—the rugged human product of such a series of difficulties cannot but fill the student with admiration. It was to search for some facts with regard to six generations of such men that I had set my heart.

Knowing that my emigrant ancestor had settled near Boston, and that successive generations had lived in Worcester county, Massachusetts, Windham county, Connecticut, and Windham county, Vermont, the only question to decide was whether to start in the beginning and work forward, or start in my own time and work backwards. The fact that I was born in Brattleboro, and that my father and mother were natives of Windham county, Vermont, the first of seven generations to move from New England finally decided me upon the latter method.

On Saturday, June 15, 1901, we stepped upon Vermont soil (mostly rock). But the hills were beautiful! Of a green that almost transcends description, no wonder the early travelers called them Green Mountains! And the rippling brooks that run adown the fields, their waters fed by never failing springs, clearer than most any crystal, who shall picture their beauty? In the language of one who had never seen these charming sights before—

“What a sensation of restfulness it gives!”

Brattleboro, the metropolis of Windham county, has been a thriving place for years. Situated on the Connecticut River its manufacturing interests have grown apace, and being in a manner the gateway to a large interior country, it has benefited thereby without cease.

Up the brawling West River runs a narrow guage

railroad making short jerky turns that would seem at times about to throw the train from the track. It passes through Newfane, where was born Roswell Field, the father of Eugene, so loved by all Missourians. On across brooks, around ledges like the course of a snake, its tortuous way leads some twenty seven miles to the old town of Jamaica.

Here over a hundred years ago my grand-fathers settled. Here were born both father and mother, and here still live numbers of relatives of various degrees. Judging by myself (righteous judgment) they were glad to welcome their consins from the wild and wooly west, and certainly we had a most enjoyable visit.

A saddening sensation is caused by the sight of so many deserted farms. Place after place can be passed, with good, although weatherbeaten, buildings still standing, where within the memory of comparatively young people there lived large and intelligent families, now alas wholly unoccupied. In the school district in which my father was born, where a half century or more ago there were fifty school children, now scarcely one resides. The township has gone backward from about 1700 population in 1850 to less than 800 in 1900. And so it is in every direction. Where once were good meadows, now grows the brush and the tree, and nature seems to be taking quick revenge upon the long continued and tireless labor with which she was at one time conquered.

And this desertion of farms brings about another condition, desertion of roads. With no one to work the highways, they become eneroached upon by the trees, and the storms of a long winter gully

them out so that they become almost impassable. In consequence, when my cousin and myself sought a team to drive us some three or four miles to the now deserted home of our grandfather, it was urged that the way was impassable, and only after much persuasion could we induce a start.

The drive up onto West hill was tedious and slow. And yet, not many years ago, many bright and happy people used to tread the road on their way to school and church. For they were a church going, God fearing class. Now none are in sight and the place which knew them once knows them no more. After reaching the top, a distance nearly three miles from the village, and one continuous climb, there remained an almost precipitous descent of nearly one half mile before the old farm was reached.

Looking out from the front door of the old homestead a charming sight met the eye. Gently sloping down was a fine field of grass, part of the old mowing ground where for a century had been cut the hay so carefully gathered for the stock during the long and inclement winter seasons. A little to one side stood a massive apple tree perfect yet in shape and preservation, with its small fruit showing beautifully between the leaves. Curiosity led us to go beneath its wide spreading branches, and its immensity was striking to behold. We carefully measured around its base and found it fully 9 feet in circumference. No doubt but the dear old tree was a century old, and its fruit had gladdened the hearts of my father and grandfather in the days long gone by. The associations which came into the heart were almost choking and I could not but

wish for a mug of cider to drink to the prosperity of the remains of the old orchard, and especially to the grand old patriarch under which we stood, which had so well born the ravages of years. For in Dorsetshire, England, they drink thus and throw the lees on the ground at the foot of the oldest tree at the same time reciting the following toast:

Yere's to thee old apple tree
 Be zure'e bud, be zure'e blow
 And bring vorth apples good enow
 Hats vul, caps vul
 Dree bushel bags vul
 Pockets vul, mouths vul
 Hearts vul and thankful—
 Huzzay, old apple tree.

The forest is narrowing down the once tilled fields, and soon the farm will only exist in a pristine state of savagery, if the changes of the last 30 years go on as rapidly in the future. And when we recognize that it would be an almost physical impossibility to haul out a 500 pound load on a wagon from this farm, the only wonder is that it remained in cultivation so long as it did.

Over against us to the northwest lies Winhall, and to the westward Stratton Mountain rears its head, one of the highest peaks of the southernmost Green mountains. These sights bring to mind the story of how in bygone days when the native inquired at the store for salt codfish, he asked for "Stratton pork!" For as the old jingle went—

Winhall for beauty,
 Jamaica for pride;
 If it hadn't been for codfish
 Stratton would have died.

So they jeered each other, but these mountains turned out bravesoldiers, beautiful women and scholarly, practical men, like the rocks in their rugged character, and likened after their beautiful

scenic surroundings in their dispositions.

In Winhall lived for many years an Irishman, James Magarr by name, who was a Revolutionary soldier. Old Jimmy, as he was called, liked his toddy extremely well, and when about to die, selected his pall bearers and called them to his bedside for a last word. He was to be buried in Jamaica, and said he—

“As ye carry me down the hill, when ye get half way, stop and take a drink; But when ye come back, dont drink, for Jimmy’ll not be with ye.”

Although these are more temperate days than then yet we can sympathise with and understand the half regretful mood of the dying old veteran.

Over Jimmy Magarr’s resting place in the burial ground in Jamaica village stands a stone on which is engraved the following inscription—

Behold and see as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so soon you’ll be
Prepare for death & fo low me.

It is related that some irreverent person on reading this immediately wrote—

To follow you I’m not intent
Until I know which way you went.

I visited many old graveyards in Jamaica, Townsend and Athens. Some are found in places now almost inaccessible, once in probably the thickest settled portion of the community. These burial places have generally from one to two hundred graves, and as a rule have been fairly taken care of, although not now used to great extent. But the old stone wall with which all are surrounded never rots away, and now more than a century old bids fair to last for ages.

Many inscriptions, more or less curious, were noted in these graveyards. In those older times it was the custom to put a verse upon the headstone, or tell in some pithy way any out of the way fact concerning the deceased. Thus over one stone was found—

He was drowned at sea

while another, over a girl of 14, said—

Her death was occasioned by her clothes taking fire while ironing.

Could the sad story be told more succinctly?

In the old hill cemetery at Athens, where lie the grandparents of General W. R. Shafter, by the way a distant cousin of the writer, was read the following inscription over the grave of a young man who died when a little past twenty years of age—

Sudden Death came hasting on
Fore I'd arriv'd to twenty-one
To take my soul from Earth away
Heaven's decree all must obey.

In the old Townsend cemetery, away off on the hillside were found the graves of my great grandfather and his wife, who died away back in the twenties. He was a Revolutionary soldier, serving first with the Minute men and afterwards in the line with old Putnam from Connecticut. It was a pleasant surprise to his descendants to find the graves in good condition, and with good head stones over them, for they were unknown to us until this visit.

Among the quaint verses read in this old Townsend grave yard was this—

Come hither mortals cast an eye
Then go thy way prepare to die
The time will come & die thou must
And then like me be turned to dust.

In the same burial place was seen an inscription which we copy literally—

Man, count thy days, and if
They fly too fast for thy dull
Thoughts to count, count
Every day thy loss.

It is but charitable in such cases to suppose that part of the error at least is to be ascribed to the ignorant stone cutter. As for instance, in the following copied from a stone in South Hill cemetery in Jamaica—

Death is no more the king of dread
Since our Immanuel rose
He took the tyrants sting away
And sild our helish foes.

Over a mother's remains in the Jamaica church yard the bereft father had carved—

Come all my children that survive
Come let us mourn together
For I have lost a bosom friend
And you a ten 'er mother.

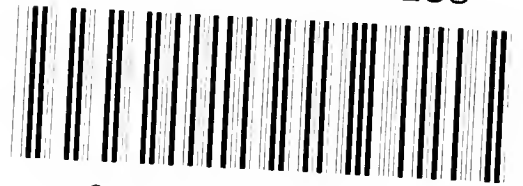
In the same place a stone over two little children read as follows—

Oh yes tis hard to give them o'er
And see their forms on earth no more
To yield the flowers ere scarce they bloom
And hide their beauties in the tomb

One more from the same location as the last two and I am done for the present—

Yes gone to the grave
Is he whom we lov'd
And lifeless that frame
That so manfully moved
The clods of the valley
Encompass his head
The marble reminds us
A Husband and Father is dead.

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